

## When Iowa Took to the Air

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## WHEN IOWA TOOK TO THE AIR

By EMORY H. ENGLISH

From its very inception interest in aviation and its vast possibilities was greater by far among the mechanics and machinists of the towns in rural areas like Iowa than in the cities of the country. The young man with run of a machine shop, the handy repair man who came to the rescue of the housewife's washing machine that would not work, the farmer's ailing binder or threshing machine, or the townsman's broken bicycle, evidenced his genius in their restoration to operation. It was such as he who had early dreams and plans of constructing a light machine that could be propelled in the air. With mechanical bent, creative genius, and a persistence that knew no defeat, these embryo aviators gave hours of study and effort to elementary aeronautics long before many people believed, or came to realize, that aviation was having its beginning. Often they were garage men expert in auto driving, who learned the rudiments of flying the hard way.

After trial upon trial and disappointments without number, these venturesome young men became more adept, and their frail crafts at last responded to their guidance. As they were able to rise in flights their biplane exhibitions secured for them substantial sums offered at county fairs. But too frequently the crackups sustained in impromptu landings damaged their planes, if not maiming or killing outright the flyer himself. The more capable men gradually overcame these handicaps and endured the rigors and routine of barn-

storming tours, giving exhibitions almost daily. This was common during the period of 1910 and 1912. More recently one of those old 1910 biplanes gave an exhibition flight at a Sheldon air show on August 18, 1940. Clem Houcamp entertained a big crowd. He said the pusher model exhibited was the oldest still in use, but was a "tough thing to handle" in a stiff breeze.

As early as 1899 W. Frank Brinton, of Washington, Iowa, the local inventor, conceived the idea of constructing a blimp, an airship lighter than air. After he had perfected his machine with the help of Oscar Solbrig, he advertised an exhibition to be given at the Washington county fair grounds on September 22, that year. The event was a failure, the reason given being the non-arrival of the gas generators for the balloon. Eight thousand people were disappointed. A second attempt resulted in the bursting of Brinton's balloon, and it never was flown. Then he set to work upon another model, which he planned would do away with the balloon part of his contrivance. He claimed that he had a new principle for the lifting of his airship which would be an innovation. No later account of his being successful or otherwise has been obtainable.

Mute but adequate testimony to the early stages of development of aviation is the flimsy type of airplane housed for a long time in the Davenport museum, the first plane built in Davenport. It was constructed and flown by a Davenport resident, Lieut. Oscar A. Solbrig. The plane weighed 800 pounds with the lieutenant aboard, and could get away quicker and ascend straighter than the modern heavier types. Perhaps Solbrig acquainted more Iowans with the actual mechanics of flying in the early stages of experimenting with the heavier than air machines than any other man in that era. He lived at Washington, Iowa, ten years, and then moved to Davenport in the nineties. In his machine shop at Washington he had assisted Frank Brinton with his small blimp in 1899. This experience fired Solbrig's

imagination and was responsible for his entering aviation work.

He became interested actively in 1911 when he entered the school and learned to fly at Curtiss field, North Island, California, and had studied the building-angle in a plane factory at Hammondsport, New York, learning the mechanics of constructing airplanes. He built a push type ship at his home one winter and assembled it in the spring. With it he gave exhibitions in flying all over the country, and his wife became the first woman airplane mechanic in the United States, also serving as business manager during his barnstorming tours, which then were most popular in Iowa. At What Cheer, Iowa, one time he took off before a crowd of 10,000 people that thronged the field and forced him to stay aloft thirty minutes, instead of the usual ten minutes.

Solbrig was credited with being the first man to put brakes on airplane wheels, and always sought to improve his plane's mechanics. He also was one of the first men to prove that airplanes were dependable apparatus that would fly year in and year out carrying mail and passengers. His planes may have been the first actually seen by thousands of Iowans. The early planes usually "cracked up," and the people assembled "to see the pilot killed," and not really to witness the airplane fly. He remained an aviator until well into 1917 when he retired, returning to the machine shop as a mechanic.

And at Red Oak, George West was another that devoted early efforts toward successful mastery of the air.

An intelligent and determined figure among Iowa's earliest aviators, who always comes to mind when the struggles and successes of those flying mechanics are considered, was Billy Robinson, of Grinnell. As a boy he haunted the repair man's shop and grew into a job that developed his flare for mechanics. Like others, bicycles were his first hobby and the simple one-cylinder auto was the next subject of interest. Long before the advent of World War I he was toying with the idea of a



flying machine, and the rapid development of aviation as an adjunct to the armed forces, rekindled his enthusiasm. He had become a partner in ownership of the repair shop, and did some experimentation with building an aeroplane engine. With his partner, Charlie Hink, an engine was built that finally exploded, but later they perfected a motor that had merit and utility, and credited with becoming a pattern for modern airplanes.

Robinson then built a flying machine, a monoplane of his own design. He gave exhibitions at the fair grounds, and later traveled with a show exhibiting the sixty-horse power motor and the plane, though immediately he did not attempt any flights. Then trained by Max Lily, experienced aviator, spending a year in Florida, he became an instructor in an aviation school in Chicago in 1911, returning to Grinnell in 1913. Perfecting his plane he made many flights in central Iowa, but finally was killed in a flight on March 11, 1916, near Ewart, Iowa, seeking to break the perpendicular record which then was 17,000 feet. Previously Robinson had been up 13,000 feet, and the year previous had established a new non-stop flight record from Des Moines to Kentland, Indiana. In this last ascent his heart became affected by the thin air of the high altitude reached, causing him to lose control of his muscles and therefore unable to handle his machine.

#### AVIATION GERM INVADES DES MOINES

In 1906 visitors and citizens in Des Moines witnessed an airship "wing its flight from the state fair grounds to the capitol and back again"; but it was not until 1911 that heavier than aircraft were demonstrated at the state fair. Two Wright biplanes were flown each day that year. Not until ten years later did the fair crowds see Ruth Law transferring from an auto to an airplane in flight. And in 1927 the Iowa fair was visited by both Lindberg and Chamberlain, who had made heroic flights over the Atlantic ocean to Europe and awed the crowds that surged about them.

The airship fever hit Des Moines with distinct force on June 2, 1911, as it had not done previously. The aviation germ fastened into the systems of more than a thousand spectators at Hyperion Club golf field northwest of the city, who watched René Simon and René Barrier of the Moisant International Aviators company as they flirted with the air currents and gave a splendid exhibition of daring air work. Capt. J. J. Frisbie also made more restricted flights with his new Curtiss-Moisant biplane, which really was not well broken in, having flown it for the first time only a week previous at Sioux City, resulting in a bad fall there. The whole city was thrilled with the accounts of the flights. The entire hill had been dotted with spectators, and on the rise in front of the Hyperion club house were parked 150 automobiles. Flying records were rehashed and the tragic deaths of John B. Moisant, Arch Hoxey and Ralph Johnstone recalled.

A. C. Beech did some early flying in Iowa. As an aviator at Oelwein on October 2, 1912, he made a flight in which he narrowly escaped injury. He had raised his biplane to 1,500 to 2,000 feet and circled the little city and fair grounds. Also, he made successful flights at the state fair grounds that year.

W. K. "Ken" Jay built his own airplane in Mason City in 1909, thereby becoming known as one of Iowa's earliest aviation enthusiasts. His efforts to fly and later exploits there are recalled by the elder citizens of Mason City. He removed to Texas and in 1917 and 1918 was civilian instructor in the U. S. army aviation school at Dallas, after which he was associated with the Springfield Aircraft company at Springfield, Mass. Returning to Texas for a time, he then removed to California and became associated with Fred E. Keeler, also a former Mason City man. They interested Lockheed and Northrop and organized the Northrop Aircraft company, which was later sold to the Douglas Aircraft company. They had been financed by William Randolph Hearst in the development of their company, which manufactured ex-

clusively military aircraft for the United States government and South American countries, a metal type plane being one of those constructed. After disposing of his plane interests Jay located on an extensive Arizona ranch, but also maintained a home in Pacific Palisades near Los Angeles, despite the 650 miles to his ranch where he spent considerable time.

### ELY'S SPECTACULAR FLIGHTS

Another air-inspired garage worker, afterward becoming known as the best auto driver in Iowa, holding automobile speed records, became enamored with the aeroplane. After witnessing in November, 1909, Charles K. Hamilton make a spectacular flight at Portland, Oregon, he decided that he also could do it. This was Eugene B. Ely, born on a farm east of Williamsburg, Iowa, October 22, 1886, who moved with his parents to Davenport, when six years old, residing there twelve years. His parents were Nathan D. Ely, an attorney and a colonel in World War I, and Emma Harrington, married at Williamsburg, and resided at 124 Thirteenth street, Davenport. Lured by the facination of the automobile young Ely went into a garage and left school in 1903. Quickly he became a car driver and ultimately an expert. In 1904 went to San Francisco and in 1906 drove a car in rescue work of the great earthquake and fire, there displaying daring and courage that later wrought out his destiny as a great aviator.

Engaged in operating an auto stage line from Northern California to Oregon, he became infatuated with aviation, and bought an old Curtiss plane, wrecking it in learning to fly. But he persisted and decided he was in the business to stay. Afterwards, with his wife who was also an aviator by that time, he traveled, giving exhibitions and doing "stunt" flying. To secure professional instruction in 1909 he entered a training school conducted by Glen H. Curtiss. An apt pupil, he soon became a favored driver, acquiring a clear understanding of the requirements of aerial navigation, as well

as experience in the profession of mastering the air. His developed skill and intrepid daring caused Curtiss to attach him to the Curtiss Exhibition company engaged in demonstrating Curtiss built planes.

At Minneapolis in May 1910, he came into prominence, when three students working under the Curtiss company having failed to carry out an exhibition contract there, Ely made a start in flight in less than eighty yards, at that time the record, and received an extra bonus of \$500 for his feat. As a result the company behind the Curtiss factory signed a long time contract with young Ely. As a professional aviator this Iowa boy won many laurels, but several times narrowly escaped death, only his remarkably cool head and steady hands saving him.

Under the Curtiss contract Ely volunteered to demonstrate to the U. S. navy department that aeroplanes could be used with practicability as scouts at sea. On November 14, 1910, Ely made a daring flight from the deck of the cruiser Birmingham across the bay at Hampton Roads, Virginia, thus springing into national prominence and becoming an epoc maker in the development of aviation as a useful adjunct to the U. S. navy. This Iowa-born young man, a month previous practically unknown, except among personal associates and those who had witnessed his exhibition flights, sprung from the obscure level of an exhibition aviator to a position of international renown. His successful five-mile flight from vessel to land demonstrated to the navy department the usefulness to them of an aeroplane scout machine operated by a competent and experienced aviator like Ely. The plane Ely used to make the flight was the same one which Glen Curtiss used on his flight from Albany to New York, called the "Hudson Flyer."

It was freely predicted by navy officials that as a result of Ely's exploit the navies of the world would soon take the aeroplane into consideration when mapping out plans for action. The details of this flight were ex-



tremely interesting and merit recording. That Monday afternoon at 3:16 Ely darted from the deck of the Birmingham and shot down to the water, making a drop of eighty feet. The salt water and spray splashed into his face and spectators on the ship thought he would fail. Though blinded, Ely would not turn back. His plane shot up, up into the air and attained the height of 500 feet. Three minutes later he had reached the distant ground, sprung into international fame, and had won the \$5,000 prize offered by John Barry Ryan for the first flight of a mile or more from any ship to land. His wife, Mabel Hall, of San Francisco, also became an aviator, and was just as enthusiastic about the science of flying as the husband.

Ely's reputation grew tremendously, until he was regarded as the outstanding flyer from nativity of Iowa. Now considered one of the top group he was classed with Lincoln Beechy, Charles K. Hamilton, J. C. Mars, Hugh Robinson and C. C. Witmer, winning his share of races with these aces of the air. Though careful and always prudent Ely still enjoyed the thrills experienced in his early "stunt" flying, and occasionally indulged in them again. On October 19, 1911, at the Macon, Georgia, state fair he was engaged with others in a seven-day series of exhibitions, ill-fated for him, for his old reckless daring caused him to take chances that resulted in a dip that caused his plane to crash to the ground, killing him almost instantly. It was a tragic ending for the celebrated young flyer who long held the admiration of his home state as well as the whole country.

#### IOWAN FLIES THE ATLANTIC

But it was Clarence Chamberlain of Denison who became Iowa's own celebrated ocean flyer when first he made the longest non-stop flight to Germany, forced down near Eisleben, 110 miles southeast of Berlin, in an early morning landing on June 6, 1927. His plane, originally the Bellance, but rechristened the Columbia, was in perfect condition, but out of fuel. This was the



second leg of the flight, the water jump having been covered in just twenty-one hours. Two weeks previous Charles Lindberg had reached the Irish coast in 17 hours and fifteen minutes. The American Ambassador, Jacob Gould Schurman, went to the Berlin airdome to meet Chamberlain and Charles Levine who accompanied him, they having refueled the plane and journeyed on to Berlin.

While Lindberg's exploit had secured first recognition, wild enthusiasm again swept over this country upon receipt of the news of Chamberlain's successful arrival at Berlin and his big reception at the German capital. There had been feverish intensity exhibited in awaiting the news of the flight. Chamberlain's parents had kept vigil at the Associated Press office at Omaha and were overjoyed and relieved when word of the frequent sightings of the plane over England were received. At the home town of Denison, Iowa, the populace went wild with enthusiasm, the streets paraded and bonfires lighted. It developed that Chamberlain had lost his way in a heavy Atlantic fog, and suddenly had dropped from the clouds over a European city, and a short time later landed near Eisleben.

In New York Mrs. Wylda Chamberlain was given a check for \$15,000 from the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce to carry to her husband, and accompanied by Mrs. Grace Levine, wife of the backer of the flight, started upon a ten-day trip to Berlin, which had taken their husbands less than two days to cover.

Lieut. Gov. Clem Kimball journeyed from Council Bluffs to Denison and congratulated Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Chamberlain who had returned home to join with the local friends of "Chuck" and the family in the community celebration. Young Chamberlain's youthful rides, familiar to all his townsmen admirers, were featured in the parade. First came a baby carriage, then a tricycle, followed by a bicycle, a motorcycle and an automobile. His last famous ride was depicted by a

miniature airplane held aloft from a slowly moving car. "We knew he could do it," and "It took an Iowa boy to do it" were printed on standards and carried in the parade.

Denison enjoyed to the uttermost another big day when Clarence returned home in August, greeting him joyously and according high honors of having become a state and national hero. A modest young man always, he was becomingly so in his unaffected conduct among his friends and neighbors. Later he was a guest at the Iowa state fair and was lionized and applauded wherever he was seen.

In Denison the father was a jeweler and a watchmaker, owned the first automobile driven there—an Oldsmobile with one cylinder, which Clarence quickly learned to operate. Later he was a motorcycle performer in a carnival airdrome, accomplishing most difficult acts with an ease that seemed remarkable. After graduating in the Denison high school in 1911, Clarence entered Iowa State college at Ames in 1912, continuing in the electrical engineering course for two years, which he did not complete because of having established a motorcycle and auto parts business at Denison, and serving as a chauffeur. During a trip west in 1915, he witnessed a flying boat at San Diego giving passengers trips at \$25.00 each. He was intrigued with the exhibition.

Then came the World war in 1917 and young Chamberlain entered the U. S. training school in aeronautics at Champaign, Illinois, and began his flying in 1918; but from his station at Hoboken, New Jersey, in November of that year, he and others of the members of his squadron awaiting orders, heard the news of the signing of the armistice. In July following he resigned from the army, but continued his interest in flying, acting as a pilot for photographers for a time, and eventually did some work in reconditioning surplus army planes, and piloting. Then came some duration flights, and with Bert Acosta made a new world record of 51

hours, 11 minutes and 25 seconds. Dreams of a Paris flight enthused him, finally developing into the reward of his ambitions in company with Charles Levine.

In 1928 Chamberlain was appointed Aeronautic Engineer of New York City to act as consultant on the construction of the municipal airport on Barren island, from which position he launched companies operating factories, constructing airports and establishing flying schools.

#### HARTMAN LENDS LEADERSHIP

Perhaps no other man is more entitled to credit as one who aided in development of aviation and location of airports in Iowa than Art J. Hartman, of Burlington, a veteran of the air. The history of aviation in his home city is largely that of his own activities and those in which he had a major part. To this continuous background new chapters are being added, for Hartman is still alive and as enthusiastic an air man as in the years gone by.

The earliest flying machine to appear in Burlington was piloted by Harry Atwood, who made a flight down the Mississippi river in 1913. Ruth Law exhibited her plane there at the fair grounds in 1914. Both are still living and members of the "Early Bird" fraternity, in which Hartman claims seniority without dispute. Many other noted aviators since have visited Burlington and were well known to Hartman. Among them were R. G. Fowler, who made the first east-west flight from coast-to-coast in 1911, in fifty-three days. Others of note were Art Gobel, first pilot to fly from California to Honolulu; Amelia Earhart, who lost her life in a Pacific flight; Wiley Post, who with Will Rogers was killed in a crash in Alaska; Martin Johnson, aviator and explorer, who traveled with his wife in their private plane; Jimmie Doolittle, who more recently led the U. S. bomber raid on Tokio; Roscoe Turner, who set the air-time record between Los Angeles and Cleveland; Frank Hawk, who established a coast-to-coast time mark, and

was killed about ten years ago, besides countless others of less celebrity among Hartman's aviator acquaintances.

He was a boilermaker by trade, to whom the adventure of upper air had an appeal since boyhood. He left Burlington in 1903, and hired out as a parachute jumper from hot air balloons at fairs and carnivals. In 1907 he made many flights with the Goddard airship, a lighter than aircraft 64 feet long and 17 feet wide. He quit ballooning in 1909, and got in touch with Wright brothers, learning all he could from them, and built himself a plane. It flew, but not so high, but was off the ground, and that was something then. Continuing his experiments and exploits Hartman joined with Herb Cellar in 1919, and bought a Jenny plane, with L. D. Rockwell, World War I flyer, as pilot. In 1927 the Burlington Airplane company was formed by Hartman, and with Art Logan, launched into the business of building ships, calling them the Hartman plane, embodying a number of innovations of his own invention. Later the company was incorporated by a group of Burlington men with Hartman as its president. He was instrumental in locating several airports, principally upon the Agency road, and finally became manager of the Burlington municipal airport.

According to Lester P. Barlow, former Clear Lake, Iowa, inventor and enginer, who attained renown in 1940 for his liquid oxygen bomb, and at one time attached to the bombing division of the Glen L. Martin Aircraft Co., of Baltimore, his brother, Floyd Barlow, piloted the first airplane flown in Iowa in 1912. The Barlows and their boys were residents of Clear Lake for fifteen and more years, some relatives still living there.

Lincoln Beechy did a great deal of "stunt" flying in Iowa, and was one of the better known early flyers. He performed in aerial exhibitions flying at the Iowa state fair in 1915. At that time the engine on his biplane was between the wings and the propeller behind



them, the pilot sitting in a chair-like seat out in front of the lower wing, like shown in the illustration preceding this article. The machine was constructed as a sort of framework with nothing enclosed. Not many months later Beechy fell into San Francisco bay while making a flight and was drowned.

Two Iowa men were issued civilian flying licenses in May, 1919. They were Lieut. Earl Kenneth Campbell, of Strawberry Point, and Lieut. Charles Fred Taylor, of Waterloo. The licenses were issued by the joint Army and Navy board of Aeronautic Cognizance at Washington, D. C. under authority of the proclamation of the president on February 28, 1918. The holder was permitted to make flights for pleasure and commerce in the United States. Both men had previously been mustered out of the U. S. air service.

Col. Art Gobel, the famous Pacific flyer, came to Des Moines flying the north and south trail route from Minneapolis to Kansas City in May, 1929. This was the first trip of the air express from the twin cities of Minnesota. Using a Fairchild monoplane owned in Des Moines, he had within the daylight interval of eleven hours rolled across the turf of Kansas City, Des Moines and Minneapolis, and then back through Des Moines to Kansas City again, with ample time in each city for ceremonies befitting a maiden flight.

The first privately owned custom-made airplane in Iowa was a training biplane bought of the government at Minneapolis for \$8,000, by Lieut. H. G. Donaldson and his brother, Lieut. F. A. Donaldson, of Milford, both of whom had been in U. S. aviation service. Soon after getting their discharge from service they learned of the sale to be had, and made the purchase in March 1919, driving the plane to their home town in Dickinson county in two hours, delighting the home folks by "taking them up." Airplane rides over the Okobojis became the summer sport at Milford. The machine was equipped with every appliance used by the aviation division of



the U. S. army. "I don't see why Uncle Sam didn't put at least one flying field up in Iowa—God's country—instead of two-thirds of them in Texas—No Man's Land," said Lieut. H. G. Donaldson, as he calmly stepped out of the newly-purchased airplane when he and his brother arrived at Milford.

The early coast-to-coast flyers faced freezing weather crossing the Rocky mountains, three being killed in accidents during the first continental flight. Groups of airmen bound both east and west stopped at the Herring field, at the north limits of Des Moines, operated by W. B. Swaney, himself a flyer, making careful landings enroute because of the heavy rains encountered which made landing fields soggy and dangerous. Forty-seven machines started on the flight from the east at Mineola, October 9, 1919, and fifteen entered the trial flight from San Francisco, many of which were forced out of the race, or waited over for repairs at various cities. The object of these flights was time, reliability and endurance test of planes used.

#### AIR MAIL SERVICE ESTABLISHED

The first airmail flight in the United States took place on May 15, 1918. It was Lieut. Torsy H. Webb, in a little Curtiss biplane that rode over Belmont park, Long Island, on the first leg of the first U. S. mail route, New York to Washington, D. C., via Philadelphia. At the same moment in Washington, Lieut. Geo. L. Boyle started for Philadelphia on the northward mail flight.

Madeline Hayden, 3228 Ingersoll avenue, employee of the *Des Moines Register*, received the first letter by aerial mail service to be delivered in Des Moines. The envelope carried a 16-cent U. S. postage stamp of the new airplane design. It was postmarked at New York Sept. 4, 1918, "Airmail Service, Wash.-N.Y.-Phila.," and arrived at Des Moines at 7 a.m., Sept. 6. It was in transit forty-six hours, probably coming by railroad mail from Philadelphia.

The planning of airmail routes, the flying of the first mail planes, and the locating of mail stops that would be convenient to transcontinental lines and profitable to operate, were all history making and eventful in those days of the early twenties. There was some early competition between Des Moines and Iowa City for the one stop that was first planned between Chicago and Omaha. The university town was nearer the half-way mark, and the Capital city could furnish more mail.

Capt. Jack Knight was the pilot of the old open cockpit single-engined plane that made the preliminary test flight of approximately 700 miles in the midwest section of the transcontinental line in February, 1921. It was to be demonstrated that mail could be flown both night and day, and he had the night flight. Afterwards he told how he picked up the mail one night at North Platte, Nebraska, and flew 275 miles to Omaha without benefit of navigation instruments, radio, or any of the other modern developments of aviation. Bonfires along the way were the only guide. He and a small group of pilots were determined to prove to congress that the air mail could be flown at night as well as in the day time.

Arriving at Omaha he learned that on account of the bad weather the proposed flight to Chicago had been cancelled. Undaunted, and realizing what was at stake, he communicated with authorities at Washington, D. C., and secured permission to continue the flight. Using an automobile road map and a flashlight as his only means of navigation, Knight told afterwards of starting out only to find the ceiling had dropped 500 feet and that a drizzle had set in.

Following auto headlights on the ground below, wondering every minute just how high the Iowa hills were, and how tall the grass on those hills might be, and with gas enough for three hours, Knight came flying over western Iowa. An extremely heavy fog

enveloped the vicinity of Des Moines, and because his gas was too low to seek landing or turn back, the little open plane was pushed on toward the east. When over Marengo he had just sixteen minutes of gasoline left. Then quickly over Iowa City he could not discover a landing field after circling the little city several times, and with only seven minutes of gas in the tank he sighted a railroad fuse burning on the ground in a field. Taking it for the landing field, he decided it might be the airport and landed his plane. It was the airport, but the officials had closed it for the night, having been notified that the night flight had been abandoned, and it was night watchman having heard a plane in the air, quickly lighted the fuse. The act saved Knight from a possible crash landing, and enabled him to refuel and proceed to Chicago, arriving at day-break, a relief pilot carrying the flight on to New York. The night watchman at Iowa City had saved the air mail, and Knight's contention favoring night flying vindicated. The demonstration convinced Washington authorities that it was possible even though hazardous. Since then the progress from the safety standpoint, as well as others, has been rapid, and air travel has become the safest mode of transportation. The art of flying has become the science of flying, and trans-Pacific, as well as trans-Atlantic routes, are flown with the same accuracy as those over the continents.

Twenty years later Knight, then an employee of the United Air Lines, came to special community meetings at Iowa City and Des Moines, honoring the anniversary of his famous night flight of two decades previous. Civic officials, postmasters, air transport employees along the San Francisco-New York airway joined in this celebration of the transcontinental achievement in 1921.

#### DES MOINES GETS AIRMAIL STOP

Des Moines was first assured of being placed upon an airmail route as early as March 10, 1920. Col. Joup

G. Marrow, of the U. S. war department, was directed to come to the city the following week to arrange for the landing facilities. The two landing fields then suggested were Herring field, on Merle Hay road north of the city, and the parade grounds at Fort Des Moines. Charles S. Worth, of the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce, was in Washington, D. C., at the time and had secured the co-operation of Congressman C. C. Dowell and Secretary E. T. Meredith, of the Agricultural department, in accomplishing the action assured. Original plans had provided for the inclusion of Des Moines as an official stop of the mail planes crossing Iowa between Chicago and Omaha. However, the postal department changed its plans later without advising Des Moines representatives, and on their trial trips had made but one stop in the state and that at Iowa City.

Early there was much rivalry. The Greater Iowa City committee once filed a petition with the U. S. civil aeronautics authority protesting the proposed air route linking Minneapolis and St. Louis via Des Moines. They sought instead consideration of a route to serve Iowa City, Waterloo and Dubuque, Iowa, and Moline, Rock Island, Peoria and Springfield, Illinois, alleging a much larger population to be served thereby. Hearings were had, but the route was established through Des Moines.

As a unique airmail parcel a small pig was mailed in 1920 from Iowa City to the Congress hotel in Chicago.

Actually an airplane bearing mail, piloted by Ruben L. Wagner, made the first stop in Des Moines July 1, 1925, establishing the city as a regular airmail station, and assuring interests locally of continued service. 10,000 automobiles and 40,000 people were in the pastures along the airfield awaiting the arrival of the plane at 9:50 p.m. The welcoming committee was headed by James Carss, 94 year old civil engineer, who helped



build the first railroad into Des Moines, and rode on the "cowcatcher" of the first train into the city, pressed forward to greet the winged messenger. A heavy incoming mail was unloaded, and nearly 10,000 letters constituted the mail from Des Moines loaded for the west. The innovation entailed additional facilities at the airport field, with installation of powerful flood and search lights. These were installed prior to the expected event and had been rushed to completion in readiness for the realization of air mail privileges, so important to the business and industrial interests of the city and state.

The project for a municipal airport in Des Moines was inaugurated in June of 1926, when civic organizations put before the city council a demand for action on plans to pick a site for a municipal airport. The government's air mail field near the Iowa Power & Light Co.'s plant southeast of the city had been abandoned, and Des Moines was actually isolated so far as air travel was concerned. And it was on December 13, 1926, the council signed a five-year lease for the Hanna farm out Altoona way. This field was opened in July, 1927, after the city had expended \$12,000 in preparation for its use. In 1928 \$35,000 was spent for the first hanger erected. In 1931 the council purchased the Truman Jones farm south of the city, which was dedicated in 1933. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been expended in creating there the modern airport now in use. Similar statements could be recited of establishment of other airports in the cities and county seats of Iowa, the whole state being dotted with them, for all Iowa is now air-minded.

#### PLANES AID NEWSGATHERING

In May, 1928, the *Des Moines Register and Tribune* purchased a Fairchild cabin monoplane and inaugurated this air aid in newsgathering and taking pictures over the state. Also they had the purpose of demonstrating that we were entering definitely into the early stages



of a new air age, which has been so significantly realized. Ten years later, and the *Register and Tribune* had utilized six planes, each new model succeeding the predecessor, in newspaper work. The sixth, bought in May 1938, was also christened "Good News," the same as all the others. They had carried 35,624 passengers in the ten years, and covered 606,935 miles in 5,341 flying hours. They had flown repeatedly to all the surrounding states, and all over Iowa, besides a trip to the dust bowl of Kansas and Oklahoma.

Ellen Church, of Cresco, Iowa, took to the air in a 100-mile an hour United Air Lines plane in 1930, as one of a group of thirty stewardess. She was considered the world's first air stewardess, the founder of the United's stewardess system. Pilots and airline executives alike then were skeptical of the value of girl attendants, but now so much a part of commercial aviation. After two years in the air Ellen Church returned to her profession as a nurse of the children's department in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, county hospital.

The late Dr. T. C. Denny was the first Des Moines passenger to buy an airplane ticket for a trip to San Francisco, leaving here at 1:15 a.m. Sept. 17, 1927, arriving there at 6 p.m. The seventeen-hour trip cost him \$181.00, and was flown on a Boeing Air Transport plane. His baggage was limited to twenty-five pounds, having shipped his additional baggage by train. By 1930 airplane transportation may be said to have become an established business.

In the *Iowa Law Review*, a publication of the Iowa State Bar association, issue of February, 1931, Geo. A. Hise, a Des Moines lawyer, contributed an article discussing "Ownership and Sovereignty of the Air, or Air Space Above Land Owner's Premises, with Special Reference to Aviation."

Miss Jeanne Richardson was the first woman to make a solo flight at the Monthel Flying field at Jefferson, Iowa, in 1938. She was said to be the youngest pilot then in Iowa.

The first Dubuque girl to make a solo flight in Dubuque was sixteen-year-old Florence Freeman, on May 17, 1940, having completed her preliminary flying instructions at the Dubuque municipal airport.

Another Iowa woman aviator, Mrs. Virginia Snodgrass, of Waterloo, made her first solo flight in June 1938. A year later she had become so proficient in her profession that she became the only woman in the state then holding a commercial pilot's license, which was presented to her by the inspector for the civil aeronautics authority on June 9, 1939.

#### IOWA SUPERVISES AIR TRAFFIC

It is in the message of Governor Hammill to the Iowa legislature in 1929 that aviation was first mentioned officially by a governor. Several years earlier a bill had been proposed to exempt airfields from taxation as a means of encouraging the development of aviation. Hammill said:

Aeronautic legislation is of great importance to the people of the state. Cities and towns should be granted the power to establish, maintain and operate airports and landing fields either within or without their limits, to issue bonds for that purpose and to levy a tax to pay such bonds and interest . . . The secretary of state should be vested with power and authority to make and promulgate regulations covering air traffic rules in this state which shall conform and coincide with the Air Commerce act of 1926.

The Forty-third General Assembly in 1929 enacted the first Iowa law for supervision of aerial transportation. It authorized the licensing of aircraft and airmen, and established air traffic rules. The act also prescribed rules and regulations to be followed in the operation of civil aircraft; but the Forty-sixth General Assembly amended this latter provision to allow these rules and regulations to be waived by the commission of aeronautics established by act of the Forty-fifth General assembly, when so done in writing.

Authorization for establishment of airports also was provided by act of the Forty-third General Assembly,

conferring upon municipalities, powers of acquisition, levying of taxes, issuance of bonds, making improvements, and providing for ordinances and rules deemed in the public interest.

The aeronautics commission established by act of the Forty-fifth General Assembly had but limited powers, its activities being confined to duties of licensing planes and pilots, making investigations and general administration. However, this was a formal beginning of supervision of the rapidly expanding aviation industry. Other incidental legislative acts included that of the Fortieth General Assembly adding airplanes, seaplanes, dirigibles, and other craft, to the class of property that may be insured in Iowa; also, by the Forty-sixth General Assembly defining what is an obstruction to aviation when located near airports, and declaring same to be a nuisance.

The Iowa Aeronautics commission as at present constituted was created by the Fifty-first General Assembly, repealing former sections of the law, originally enacted in a sort of fragmentary manner, authorizing a commission with limited powers. It consists of five members without salary, receiving \$9.00 per diem when engaged in duty for the commission, with a maximum of \$450 per year per member, with duties and powers prescribed.

Registration is required of persons engaged in aeronautics and operation of aircraft and aeronautic facilities; payment of fees and issuance of certificates are authorized, and penalties provided.

The law defines the meaning of the terms aeronautics, aeronautics instructor, aircraft, air instruction, airman, air navigation, air navigation facility, airport, air school, civil aircraft, landing area, municipality, operation of aircraft, person, public aircraft and operation for hire, and is generally regarded as complete and up-to-date in its provisions.

The commission appointed by the governor now consists of P. E. Norris, chairman, Centerville; Guy Richardson, vice chairman, Jefferson; Harry Tyler, secretary, Villisca; George Beaty, Independence, and Harry Coffie, Estherville. Regular meetings are scheduled for each month and the commission has offices at Des Moines.

### MUNICIPAL PORTS AND TRAINING SCHOOLS

The establishment of municipal airports and improvement of landing facilities gave impetus to local flying. Hangars were built and flying schools organized, in charge of experienced trainers. Student flying became the vogue, which still continues unabated. Since the beginning of World War II the colleges of the state in co-operation with the government have afforded courses in aeronautics, included in curriculum, being air navigation, meteorology, civil air regulations and the theory of flight. Planes were provided for students, groups of whom vie with each other in acquiring expertness.

Airplane schools for workers both upon planes and in connection with ground activities, all having to do with air transportation, also were organized in various cities of the state, for training of mechanics and experts in the intricacies of aircraft construction and operation.

By 1941 the number of air pilots certified as licensed in Iowa by the civil aeronautics administration, was 1,882, of which 1,659 held private pilot licenses, nine limited commercial, and five airline transport. Three years previous there were licensed 268 pilots and 180 planes in this state. Iowa then had thirty-five landing fields and airports, of which nine were lighted. There were eighteen municipal ports and fourteen commercial. And the state then ranked twenty-fourth among all states in this category.

Federal aid for municipal airports came in the forties, and many Iowa cities availed themselves of this help



to build or improve landing facilities. Twenty-two Iowa airports were included in the huge government program of appropriations for 1927-48, with tentative plans for improvement of the sixty existing ports. This makes available for a total of 101 cities in the Hawkeye state, to be helped by government funds, of the more than 200 ports in operation, to the total amount of six million dollars aid in the next seven years.

Now regular scheduled flights upon several established air routes have radiated from the principal cities of the state, connecting them by air facilities with practically all points of the compass. In an article of limited length like this only reference can be made to the great growth of aerial activities in and through Iowa. It has been the transportation end of the business that has flourished in Iowa, as the manufacturing of planes quite naturally became the specialty of huge organizations commanding vast capital the growth of which was accelerated by government contracts in the progress of World War II and years since its close.

#### PRIVATE USE OF PLANES

The time finally arrived when flying became a sport to be enjoyed by everyday mortals, as well as a necessity in the commercial world and the army. In the thirties business and professional men bought and operated planes. Executives found it a saving of time and money, too, to pilot their own ships. Others who were financially able employed pilots, sometimes with several executives using the same ship in trips. In some instances a group would invest in and use a plane. Another wrinkle in private aviation was for enthusiasts to form a flying club, incorporate, take in members and jointly buy and operate a ship. Then the members payed so much an hour for operating the craft, the funds so realized to be used for upkeep, repairs, depreciation, etc.

The returned veterans of World War II have greatly augmented the ranks of private flyers and some have



engaged in commercial flying, using their knowledge of aviation secured in government service. Others reside upon Iowa farms and also have purchased aircrafts for pleasure and practical use. Many farmers and small town residents, who utilize pastures for landing fields, avail themselves of the privileges of air transportation in flying their own planes.

Some of those flying privately do so just for the pleasure and as a recreation. A few combine fun and business, while others are outdoors men who find their sport in fishing and hunting in northern places. With a plane they can take the week end off for outdoors activities in far-off territory. All like to go places quickly and often-times they find flying an economical way.

Besides local uses more extended business trips are required. As an example of the utility of the plane for the farmer cornbelt cattle feeders now need give careful study to the supply of feeder stock available from various sources. As they import to Iowa farms annually upwards of two million head of young cattle they must search dilligently for this supply. To some the airplane has become almost a necessity in covering large areas in a short period for farmers engaging in this activity. Thus the southeastern states have come into competition with western cattle growers, and the midwest feeder is extending his buying of young cattle to an ever widening area by use of his plane.

These plane owners and operators today do not consider themselves pioneers, but there are many who believe that several decades hence they will rank with those whose names and photos now appear in print with the caption "Owned First Car in City." They are just blazing another trail which soon may be commonly traveled.

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